

Listening Session for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging

Hosted by the Alabama Department of Senior Services
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Birmingham, Alabama

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Development Commission

Representing: Alabama Association of Regional Councils

I appreciate the opportunity to offer these comments before this Listening Session on behalf of the Alabama Association of Regional Councils (AARC). The East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (EARPDC) is an Area Agency on Aging (AAA), as are most of the Councils of Governments (COGs) in Alabama. We are a public transportation provider; and as are most of the Alabama Councils of Governments, we are a Senior Community Service Employment Program subgrantee under Title V of the Older Americans Act. The Senior Community Service Employment Program provides participants age 55 and older with subsidized training at community service sites in nonprofit and government agencies as a transition to unsubsidized employment in the public or private sectors. As a senior community service employment program (SCSEP) subgrantee, we have serious concerns about the directions taken and the new regulations promulgated by the U.S. Department of Labor. These new regulations severely limit potentially eligible applicants for the program. Mr. Tony Sarmiento, representing Senior Services America, Inc. (SSAI), will discuss these eligibility rules in his presentation to this Listening Session.

The older worker is an important resource to our state and our nation at a time when we are struggling to maintain a qualified, competitive workforce. However, the older worker is generally ignored in workforce development initiatives. It is important that the range of services available to seniors be coordinated and integrated, because the various issues related to seniors are interconnected. Programs, such as the Senior Community Service Employment Program, Workforce Investment Act programs, senior service programs under Title III of the Older Americans Act, and public transportation services funded through the Federal Transit Administration must be planned and implemented in a coordinated approach so they may effectively respond to the needs of the senior population.

There is a direct relationship between adequate transportation systems and the effectiveness of workforce development, especially in reaching lower income, entry level and older workers. Access services are a critical component of both training and employment and there remains many barriers, failures to coordinate transportation resources, and inadequate levels of resource commitment.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to make these comments.